

May 05, 1999

To: All Certified Laboratories

Re: Laboratory Notification of
Acute Drinking Water Contamination

Over the past several months the Department of Health Services, Drinking Water Program staff have experienced problems with communication between certified laboratories and contracting water systems with regard to the rapid transfer of results of water quality analyses that could have serious public health implications. Specifically, we have several examples of situations where laboratories have been unable to communicate information on water samples with positive coliform findings including fecal coliforms or high nitrate levels directly to a live individual at the water systems.

Instead messages have been left on voice mail or e-mail sent when contact with an individual could not be made. In some cases, days to weeks passed before the information was picked up resulting in serious delays of critical corrective actions necessary to ensure public health.

To address this situation, effective immediately, the Department hereby requests all laboratories certified for drinking water analyses to implement the following notification procedures:

1. Laboratory notification of positive bacteriological samples or nitrate MCL exceedance must be made by contacting a live individual at the water systems. If voice mail or e-mail is used to leave a message, the laboratory must do follow-up contacts until they reach a live individual at the water system. Document all contact(s) made.
2. In the event a laboratory cannot contact a live individual at the water system within 24 hours, the laboratory must notify the Department's Drinking Water program of the positive bacteriological results or acute nitrate MCL exceedance. Document the contact(s) made.

The Department is in the process of promulgating regulations to require rapid transfer of results of water quality analyses results including timely notification of acute drinking water contamination by laboratories and public water systems. Prior to the adoption of regulations, the above interim measures will help improve communication among the public water systems and contracting laboratories with the Department regarding drinking water contamination. Your continuing support and efforts in ensuring safe drinking water supply are appreciated.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact ... at (510)540-2800.

Sincerely,

George C. Kulasingam, Ph. D., Program Chief
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